

LAWRENCE CLIFFORD DENISON



18th December 1915

1890-1915 Aged 24

Private 2428, 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force). Laurie Denison was born at the end of 1890 in Calverley, the only son of Dyson and Mary Smith Denison. Their daughter Winifred Margery died in 1902 aged seven. Dyson Denison was from Bradford, where his father worked as a cashier. He made a good marriage to Mary, who was his senior by several years and the daughter of a wool-dealer, Robert Smith Butterfield, who had retired to Bolton. Dyson's career prospered as he progressed in the stationery trade, going into business with his brother Walter as a printer and wholesale stationer at Providence Street, Bradford (telephone number "Labelit"). Both families moved to Southfield Square, in Manningham. It is possible Lawrence attended the nearby Bellevue Grammar School, as his near contemporary J.B. Priestley did, for he was only at the Bradford Grammar School for his final school year, from 1905-1906. After leaving at sixteen he worked in his father's business as a 'letterpress manager' (1911 census). They moved to Bankfield Parade, Nab Wood, Shipley.

In common with many young men in search of comradeship and activity, Laurie became a 'Saturday-night soldier' in the Bradford Territorials, whose 'H' Company consisted largely of Old Bradfordians. He was with them for four years and although he had resigned before 1914, when war broke out he was quick to re-join his former comrades in what had been re-organized into 'C' Company. The Bradfordian published an appeal *'that many more Old Boys will join, in order that the Company may be composed solely of Old Bradfordians'*. With most of his fellows, Denison signed the Imperial Service Obligation to serve overseas and he landed in France with 49th West Riding Division on 16th April 1915. Their introduction to trench warfare in a quiet sector was followed, from early July, by a six-month spell in the Ypres Salient. The Autumn rains began in late August. Another former pupil in the same Company described the conditions of November in a letter home: *'It has been raining for weeks now and the trenches are waist deep in water. Waders reaching to our waist protected us to some extent but we were wet to the skin the whole time. Dug outs there were none – bits of corrugated iron stretched across the highest bits of trench were the best we could do. The para-*



Photo courtesy of Bradford Grammar OBA

pets kept falling down and had to be rebuilt. Men were in real danger of drowning – having to discard equipment and everything and shout for help! The infantry on both sides were absolutely indifferent to each other and only the extra energies of the artillery told us there was a war on. The communications trench was ignored being nothing but a muddy stream 3-4 feet deep and men walked as openly on the top by day as by night.' At least tours of duty were restricted to four days with regular rotations.

On 15th December, the 6th Battalion moved into the line after several days in support. Three of 'C' Company's four platoons held the advanced posts. On the 17th, enemy shelling was *'unusually heavy'*, collapsing shelters all along the line and destroying the parapet, reducing the front line to a row of shell craters. Two officers were wounded and Number 12 platoon was reduced to seven men (from around twenty). Denison is likely to have received his mortal wound in this bombardment. He was evacuated via the Advanced Dressing Station at Essex Farm to Casualty Clearing Station No.10 at Remy Siding, seven miles west of Ypres. He died *en route* in a field ambulance in the early hours of 18th December, and was buried in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery. His officer Captain Fawcett (O.B.) wrote *'He was always so cheerful, and an example in the dullest of times.'* He was unmarried. Laurie is remembered on his parents' grave at Nab Wood Cemetery, Shipley.



Acknowledgements:

I used Ancestry.com to research Denison's family history and for his military records. For Priestley's education, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31565?docPos=4>. Denison's name appears variously as 'Laurence' (Army Medal Index Card) and 'Dennison' (EV Tempest, *History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment*, 286). The Bradford Daily Telegraph reported his death in late December and is the authority for calling him 'Laurie'. The appeal in the School magazine is in *The Bradfordian*, XIX, No.120, p.23. The description of conditions at the northern extreme of the British line at Ypres is taken from the letters of Arthur Kenneth Bloomer, kindly made available by his family. For the route a casualty might follow to reach a Casualty Clearing Station from the Ypres Salient, see <http://www.1914-1918.net/wounded.htm>. I am grateful to Tricia Platts of the Bradford WW1 Group for allowing me to compare our findings.

Denison's grave is in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, south of Poperinghe, in Plot IV. A. Row 22A. The Cemetery Register entry chosen by his parents reads *Son of Dyson and Mary Denison, of 6, Grosvenor Rd., Scarborough. Native of Bradford, Yorks.*

His probate record (below, from Ancestry), shows he was a man of some substance.

The photo of his parents' grave (bottom) is courtesy of Tricia Platts. The photo is inverted. The inscription reads: *'Also Laurence [sic] ... who died of wounds received in action near Ypres Dec. 19th [sic] in the 25th year of his life Buried at xxxxxx Military Cemetery He died for King and Country.'*



DENISON Laurence of 5 Bankfield-drive Shipley Yorkshire private 1/6th battalion West Yorkshire regiment died 18 December 1915 in France on military service Administration (with Will) **London** 23 March to Dyson Denison master printer. Effects £675 4s.

